2.

A SHORT APOLOGY FOR *APOSTACY.*

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——— *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto YOU more than unto GOD, judge ye.* ACTS iv. 19.

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PREFACE.

It being upwards of two years ſince the author apoſtatized from the Eſtabliſhed Church, ſome may think it ſtrange, that he ſhould now appear before the public with an Apology.

The reaſons which induced him to reſign the office of prieſt, are well known to the preſbytery of which he was a member, and to many in the neighbourhood of that preſbytery. But the novelty of a prieſt's giving up a good benefice, at a time when he had no proſpect of bettering his condition in any other profeſſion, has led ſome, from want

of information, and others, he believes, from deſign, to miſrepreſent the motives of his reſignation.

THE regard, therefore, which he owes to truth, to the public, to himſelf, and to the repeated ſolicitations of friends, has given birth to the following Apology. Without the ſpirit of prophecy, he foreſees the conſequences. Without deſigning to offend, he foreſees that his Apology will give offence to four deſcriptions of men: To thoſe who live by the craft; to the thouſands who implicitly believe every thing they ſay; to thoſe who have ſomething at ſtake in ſupporting ghoſtly deſpotiſm; and to the prudent men, who, although they do not believe certain popular doctrines, yet think it wiſeſt and ſafeſt to follow the ſtream.

THE moſt candid inquirer after truth knows little of himſelf indeed, if he ſhould claim an exemption from miſtakes. The Apologiſt puts in no ſuch claim. Although in ſearch of truth, he knows that he may err in the ſearch. He is open to conviction, and ſeeks it; and, therefore, if, in the courſe of the Apology, he ſhould be found in error, he hopes that the Church, from the fund of charity which it poſſeſſes, will not only forgive, but endeavour to reclaim him.

DURING nine years, the Apologiſt was a Prieſt of the Church of Scotland; and, to judge from appearances, he was happy with his flock, and with his brethren of the craft: but he was deſtitute of thoſe reſources *within* which, alone, to a man of integrity, can give

reality to the appearances of happineſs. It is true, he laboured to ſeem happy; others believed him to be ſo: while the diſguiſe he put on, and the opinion of others, ſerved only to increaſe that inward pain, which, in the breaſt of an honeſt man, muſt unavoidably ariſe from a ſenſe of not doing his duty.

To ſpeak without myſtery. It became an article of the Apologiſt's creed, *That the Church of Chriſt can have no ſort of connection with civil eſtabliſhments, except ſubjection to ſuch eſtabliſhments in things purely civil;* and this conviction, whether well or ill founded, has been the reſult of long and ſerious inquiry.

He could not reconcile himſelf to the unhallowed obligation of "teaching for "doctrines the commandments of men."

This was the leaven of the Phariſees, and it is the leaven which, in a greater or leſs meaſure, has entered into the compoſition of every eſtabliſhed church upon earth.

In ſhort, he could not force himſelf to preach the old faſhioned doctrines of paſſive obedience, which, of late, have profaned the pulpit, and polluted the preſs, in this part of the united kingdoms.

The Apologiſt loves his country, and the form of its civil government; but he cannot think it neceſſary, towards the ſupport of a good government, to perſuade the great body of the people that they are beaſts. Archbiſhop Laud made the experiment; but it did not occur to him, that when he was moſt

actively employed in preaching the doctrines of paſſive obedience, that then he was moſt effectually ſapping the foundations of the fabric which he meant to ſupport.

A SHORT APOLOGY FOR APOSTACY.

AN APOLOGY FOR THE TITLE OF THE BOOK.

It could anſwer no good purpoſe here, to enter into the literal and original meaning of the word *Apoſtacy*. It need only be obſerved, that the word continued to be quite harmleſs until deſigning men found an intereſt in annexing a bad ſenſe to it. Thenceforward, and by the various improvements in theological chemiſtry, Heretic, Apoſtate, and Devil, were converted into terms of the ſame import.

I am, however, well enough pleaſed with Doctor Johnſon's definition of the

word. *Apoſtacy*, he tells us, in his dictionary, is generally applied to religion, and ſignifies, "Departure from what a "man has *profeſſed*."

AGREEABLY to this definition, there are two ſorts of Apoſtates: one, who, for the ſake of "filthy lucre," abandon tenets which they believe to be true, and *profeſs* thoſe which they believe to be falſe; another, who, for the ſake of a good conſcience, abandon tenets which they believe to be falſe, and, at every hazard, *profeſs* thoſe which they believe to be true *.

THERE are but few Apoſtates of the latter deſcription; and it would be equally diſingenuous and unmanly in me not to avow myſelf of the number.

* How far honeſt and enlightened men can be friendly to teſts and formulas in religion, I leave it to the intelligent reader to judge.

RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

WHEN man becomes a ſubject of *civil government*, he conſents to ſurrender a ſhare of his natural liberty. It is equitable that he ſhould do ſo; becauſe the ſhare which he conſents to ſurrender is only the price he pays for the protection of government.

CIVIL government is a compact between man and man, for the mutual preſervation of perſon, property, liberty, and life. Although, under ſuch a government, innovation may, ſometimes, not only be expedient, but neceſſary; yet there is a wide difference between innovation and ſubverſion*: and, therefore, the ſubject who ſhould utter or publiſh opinions tending to the

* I ſpeak of governments that are *free*. In *deſpotic* governments, reform is ſubverſion.

ſubverſion of the government which he has not only approved of, but ſolemnly engaged to defend, is amenable to the laws which the government has provided for its ſupport.

In *religion*, the caſe is quite otherwiſe. Here, I am related to God *alone* as my lawgiver, governor, and judge. Here, is no authoritative compact between man and man, concerning what is, or what is not to be believed. Here, I am altogether unconnected with man in the character of dictator. Here, I call no man lord, nor maſter. Here, if I be juſt to myſelf, I can ſurrender no portion of my natural liberty; and, if it be admitted, that true religion always was, and always will be the ſame, it follows, that, in religion, there can be neither innovation nor ſubverſion.

The laws which God has given for the government of my heart and con-

duct, are ſo full and plain, as to ſet aſide the neceſſity of an *hireling* interpreter. Has God revealed myſteries which I am to believe? I believe thoſe myſteries, not becauſe any man, or ſet of men command me to believe them; nor can I believe them becauſe I am dragooned, or bribed into the *profeſſion* of them. Faith is the reſult of perſuaſion, not of force. I believe the myſteries of religion, upon my conviction that God has revealed them.

By the right of private judgment, therefore, I mean, *The unreſtrained liberty to think, ſpeak, judge, and act for myſelf, in every matter which relates to my happineſs or miſery in another world.* This right is inalienable; becauſe my relation to God, as lawgiver and judge, cannot be diſſolved, and my obedience to him, as governor, cannot be transferred.

Upon every ſubject, therefore, in

which my intereſts in another world are concerned, I ſhall think, ſpeak, judge, and act for myſelf. All authorities, unaccompanied with ſufficient evidence, ſhall not have a grain of weight in determining my judgment. In any matter of eſſential concernment, where the evidence on both ſides appears to me equal, I ſhall beſeech the God of wiſdom and truth to enlighten my mind, and ſet me right as to that matter; and I ſhall believe that he will do it, if it be a matter fit and neceſſary for me to know.

HENCE, it is evident, how ill qualified I was, not only for being a Prieſt in any Eſtabliſhed Church, but likewiſe for officiating in that character in any ſociety who make human ſyſtems of religion the ſtandard of their faith *.

* Far be it from me to throw the leaſt reproach on the characters of thoſe illuſtrious men, whoſe pious and learned labours have done ſo much good to mankind,

To what has been ſaid on this ſubject, I need ſcarce beg leave to add a few extracts from a celebrated ſermon on the Nature of Chriſt's Kingdom, preached before the king, in 1711, by Hoadley, Biſhop of Bangor.

"As the church of Chriſt," ſays that prelate, "is the kingdom of Chriſt, he "himſelf is King: and in this it is im- "plied, that he is himſelf the ſole law- "giver to his ſubjects, and himſelf the "ſole judge of their behaviour, in the "affairs of conſcience and eternal ſal- "vation. And, in this ſenſe, therefore, "his kingdom is not of this world; "that he hath, in thoſe points, left be- "hind him no viſible human autho- "rity; no vicegerents, who can be ſaid

Luther, Calvin, Socinus, Arminius, and other ſyſtem-makers, I believe to have been wiſe and good men. Still, however, they were but men. They were liable to miſtakes and errors in their judgment; and, therefore, in matters of faith, it can neither be wiſe nor ſafe, implicitly to rely on their deciſions.

"properly to ſupply his place; no "judges over the conſciences or reli-"gion of his people. For if this were "ſo, that any ſuch abſolute vicege-"rent authority, either for the making "new laws, or interpreting old ones, "or judging his ſubjects, in religious "matters, were lodged in any men up-"on earth, the conſequence would be, "that what ſtill retains the name of the "Church of Chriſt, would not be the "kingdom of Chriſt, but the kingdom "of thoſe men veſted with ſuch autho-"rity. For whoever hath ſuch an au-"thority of making laws, is ſo far a "king; and whoever can add new laws "to thoſe of Chriſt, equally obligatory, "is as truly a king as Chriſt himſelf "is; nay, whoever hath an abſolute "authority to interpret any written or "ſpoken laws, it is *he* who is *truly* the "lawgiver, to all intents and purpoſes, "and not the *perſon* who firſt wrote or "ſpoke them.

" It is the ſame thing," continues the Biſhop, " as to rewards and puniſh-" ments, to carry forward the great " end of his kingdom.

" If any men upon earth have a right " to add to the ſanctions of his laws, " that is, to increaſe the number, or al-" ter the nature of the rewards and pu-" niſhments of his ſubjects, in matters " of conſcience or ſalvation, they are ſo " far kings in his ſtead, and reign in " their own kingdom, and not in his. " So it is, whenever they erect *tribunals*, " and exerciſe a judgment over the " conſciences of men, and aſſume to " themſelves the determination of ſuch " points, as cannot be determined but " by one who knows the hearts; or, " when they make any of their own " declarations or deciſions to concern " and affect the ſtate of Chriſt's ſub-" jects, with regard to the favour of " God, this is ſo far the taking Chriſt's

" kingdom out of his hands, and plac-
" ing it in their own.

" If the Church be the kingdom of
" Chriſt, and if this kingdom be not of
" this world, this muſt appear from the
" nature and end of the laws of Chriſt,
" and of thoſe rewards and puniſhments
" which are the ſanctions of his laws.
" The laws of Chriſt, as he left them,
" have nothing of this world in their
" view; no tendency, either to the ex-
" altation of ſome, in worldly pomp and
" dignity, or to the abſolute dominion
" over the faith and religious conduct
" of others of his ſubjects; or to the
" erecting of any ſort of temporal king-
" dom, under the covert and name of
" a ſpiritual one.

" The ſanctions of Chriſt's laws are
" rewards and puniſhments. But of
" what ſort? Not the rewards of this
" world; not the offices, or glories of

" this ſtate; not the pains of priſons,
" baniſhments, fines, or any leſſer and
" more moderate penalties; nay, not
" the much leſſer negative diſcourage-
" ments that belong to human ſociety.
" He was far from thinking that theſe
" could be the inſtruments of ſuch a
" perſuaſion, as he thought acceptable
" to God. But as the great end of his
" kingdom was to guide men to happi-
" neſs, after the ſhort images of it were
" over here below; ſo he took his mo-
" tives from that place, where his king-
" dom firſt began, and where it was at
" laſt to end; from thoſe rewards and
" puniſhments in a future ſtate, which
" had no relation to this world: and,
" to ſhow that his kingdom was not of
" this world, all the ſanctions which he
" thought fit to give to his laws were
" not of this world at all.

" ST. PAUL underſtood this point ſo
" well, that he gives an account of his

" own conduct, and that of others in " the ſame ſtation, in theſe words, " *Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we* " *perſuade men:* Whereas, in too many " Chriſtian countries, ſince his days, if " ſome, who profeſs to ſucceed him, " were to give an account of their own " conduct, it muſt be in a quite contra- " ry ſtrain: *Knowing the terrors of this* " *world*, and having them in our power, " we *do not perſuade* men, but force their " outward profeſſion againſt their in- " ward perſuaſion.

" Now wherever this is practiſed, " whether in a greater degree or a " ſmall, in that place there is ſo far a " change, from a kingdom which is " not of this world to a kingdom which " is of this world. As ſoon as ever you " hear of any of the engines of this " world, whether of the greater or the " leſſer ſort, you muſt immediately " think, that then, and ſo far, the king-

"dom of this world takes place. In-
"deed, it is too viſible to be hid, that
"wherever rewards and puniſhments
"are changed, from future to preſent,
"from the world to come to the world
"now in poſſeſſion, there, the kingdom
"founded by our Saviour, is, in the
"nature of it, ſo far changed, that it is
"become, in ſuch a degree, of the ſame
"ſort with other common earthly king-
"doms, in which the rewards are,
"worldly honours, poſts, offices, pomp,
"attendance, dominion; and the pu-
"niſhments are, priſons, fines, baniſh-
"ments, galleys, and racks; or ſome-
"thing leſs of the ſame ſort."

"When you ſee our Lord, in his
"methods, ſo far removed from thoſe
"of many of his diſciples; when you
"read nothing, in his doctrine about
"his own kingdom, of taking in the
"concerns of this world, and mixing
"them with thoſe of eternity; no com-

" mands that the frowns and diſcou-
" ragements of the preſent ſtate ſhould
" in any caſe attend upon conſcience
" and religion; no rules againſt the *in-*
" *quiry* of *all his ſubjects* into his original
" meſſage from heaven; when you read
" of no orders for the kind and chari-
" table force of penalties, or capital pu-
" niſhments, to make men think and
" chooſe aright; no calling upon the
" ſecular arm, whenever the magiſtrate
" ſhould become Chriſtian, to enforce
" his doctrines, or to back his ſpiritual
" authority; but, on the contrary, as
" plain a declaration as a few words
" can make, that his kingdom is not
" of this world: I ſay, when you ſee
" this, from the whole tenor of the goſ-
" pel, ſo vaſtly oppoſite to many who
" take his name into their mouths, the
" queſtion with you ought to be, Whe-
" ther he did not know the nature of
" his own kingdom, or church, better
" than any ſince his time? Whether

"you can ſuppoſe he left any ſuch
"matters to be decided againſt himſelf,
"and his own expreſs profeſſions? And
"whether, if an angel from heaven
"ſhould give you any account of his
"kingdom, contrary to what he him-
"ſelf hath done, it can be of any
"weight, or authority, with Chriſti-
"ans?"

I SHALL add but one extract more.
"There are ſome profeſſed Chriſtians,
"who contend openly for ſuch an au-
"thority as indiſpenſably obliges all
"around them to *unity* of *profeſſion*, that
"is, to profeſs even what they do not,
"what they cannot believe to be true.

"THIS ſounds ſo groſsly, that others,
"who think they act a glorious part
"in oppoſing ſuch an enormity, are
"willing, for their own ſakes, to retain
"ſuch an authority as ſhall oblige men,
"whatever they (that is, the prieſthood)

" themſelves think, though not to pro-
" feſs what they do not believe, yet to
" forbear the profeſſion and publication
" of what they do believe, let them be-
" lieve it of ever ſo great importance.

" BOTH theſe pretenſions are found-
" ed upon the miſtaken notion of that
" peace, as well as authority, of the
" kingdom, that is, the church of
" Chriſt. Which of them is the moſt in-
" ſupportable to an honeſt and a Chriſ-
" tian mind, I am not able to ſay; be-
" cauſe they both equally found the
" authority of the church of Chriſt
" upon the ruins of ſincerity and com-
" mon honeſty, and miſtake ſtupidity
" and ſleep for peace; becauſe they
" would both equally have prevented
" all reformation where it hath been,
" and will for ever prevent it where it
" is not already; and, in a word, be-
" cauſe both equally diveſt Jeſus Chriſt
" of his empire in his own kingdom;

" ſet the obedience of his ſubjects looſe
" from himſelf; and teach them to
" *proſtitute* their conſciences at the feet
" of others, who have no right in ſuch
" a manner to trample upon them."

SUCH were the ſentiments of a dignified prieſt, concerning the nature of Chriſt's kingdom, or, if you will, concerning the right of private judgment in religion; and they are ſentiments, at once, nervous, liberal, and humane.

THE Biſhop ſhows, in the cleareſt manner, that the church, or kingdom of Chriſt, is a ſpiritual kingdom; that its laws, rewards, and puniſhments, are altogether ſpiritual; that none but Chriſt himſelf has authority to make laws, to beſtow rewards, and to inflict puniſhments; that he has left behind him no vicegerent, no judge, no authoritative interpreter of his laws; that Chriſt has excluded from his kingdom,

not only earthly tribunals, fines, impriſonments, baniſhments, racks, violent deaths, and other puniſhments of the greater kind, but likewiſe all pains and penalties of the *leſs kind*; by which the Biſhop means, frowns, diſcouragements, ſackcloth, and the ſtool of repentance.

He ſhows, that *that unity* of *profeſſion* which is effected by fear or by force, is founded, not on the authority of the church of Chriſt, but upon the ruins of ſincerity and common honeſty. He tells Chriſtians, that their own ignorance has forged and rivetted their fetters, and that their own ſtupidity has reconciled them to the ignominy of their bondage. In ſhort, he inſinuates, in words which cannot be miſunderſtood, that it is both wiſer and ſafer for every man to become his own prieſt, than to truſt the direction of conſcience to a hired and incorporated prieſthood.

THOSE who are unacquainted with the hiſtory of the Biſhop, will probably imagine, that his deſign in publiſhing his ſermon, muſt have been to bring about a reform in the church. That this neither was, nor could be his deſign, is manifeſt from the whole ſtrain of the ſermon, which goes to prove, that a national church, or a church connected with the ſtate, cannot be the church of Chriſt.

BESIDES, the Biſhop knew that a corrupted body cannot purify itſelf. It is not reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the Biſhop could think that practicable which a Prophet had declared to be impoſſible, namely, that "the Ethio-"pian ſhould change his ſkin, or the "leopard his ſpots."

BUT, it will be ſaid, if the Biſhop had nothing in view like a reform in the church, that the preaching and

publication of the ſermon muſt be regarded as the harbinger of his *reſignation*. No. Nothing like it. His Lordſhip, till his laſt breath, kept his ſtation in that very kingdom, which, with ſuch manly eloquence, and force of argument, he had proved to be the kingdom of the prieſthood, and not the kingdom of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Whether the Biſhop had prevailed upon himſelf to barter conſcience for eight thouſand pounds a-year, or whether his ingenuity had enabled him to conquer his ſcruples, and reconcile his conduct with his principles, are points which it is not poſſible for me, nor perhaps for any man, to determine.

Be this as it might, one thing is certain, that his ſermon kindled a flame throughout England which was not ſoon, nor eaſily extinguiſhed. It drew upon him the wrath and curſe of the whole brotherhood. The combat be-

tween him and them was long, obſtinate, and furious.

It was neceſſary, however, to put an end to a controverſy which could ſerve no purpoſe, but to excite, among all ranks of men, a ſpirit of inquiry into the nature of Chriſt's kingdom; and, if the controverſy had laſted much longer, it is probable, that every man who had the courage to make uſe of his reaſon would have embraced the Biſhop's ſentiments.

The Court, on that memorable occaſion, ſhowed a great deal more political ſagacity than the church. The King himſelf graciouſly undertook to cure the madneſs of the Biſhop. The King felt the pulſe of the prieſt, and found the diſtemper not incurable. The King raiſed him from the See of Bangor to that of Wincheſter, the fatteſt benefice at that time in England.

THE promotion operated upon the Biſhop like a magical charm. It purged his pen from gall, and ſhut his mouth for ever; ſo that, thenceforward, there were no more diſputes about the nature of Chriſt's kingdom.

HUMAN CREEDS AND ARTICLES OF FAITH.

IF the general idea of religion, given in the preceding article, be founded in truth; if religion is not a compact between man and man; if man, as a religious creature, be altogether unconnected with man in the character of judge and dictator; if man be related to God alone as lawgiver and judge; if this relation cannot be diſſolved; and if man's obedience to God as governor cannot be transferred to any creature; it will hence follow, that human creeds

and articles of faith, authoritatively binding on the conſciences of mankind, are, on the one hand, a groſs violation of the rights of man, and, on the other, a profane uſurpation of the prerogatives of God.

THE Bible alone is the Chriſtian's confeſſion of faith. Had Chriſt intended that there ſhould be any other, he would have told us ſo: had Chriſt intended that his miniſters ſhould make articles of faith, authoritatively binding on his ſubjects, he would certainly have left them the commiſſion; but having no where told us of any ſuch commiſſion, we have every reaſon to conclude, that he never intended that they ſhould exerciſe any ſuch authority.

IN order to ſet this matter in a clear light, it will be proper to make a few remarks upon the following topics:

Firſt, Upon the origin of human creeds and articles of faith.

Secondly, Upon the general character of the men who framed them. And,

Laſtly, Upon the effects which thoſe creeds and articles of faith have produced in the Chriſtian world.

HUMAN creeds and articles of faith derived their origin from what the orthodox have called, the *corruptions of Chriſtianity*; and, from the apoſtolical writings, it appears, that, in the Chriſtian church, corruptions had ſprung up at a very early period.

PETER, in an epiſtle addreſſed to his diſperſed countrymen, predicts the time when there ſhould be falſe teachers among them, "who ſhould bring in "*damnable hereſies*, even denying the "Lord that bought them, and ſhould

"bring upon themſelves ſwift deſtruc-
"tion *."

IT is neither neceſſary, nor does it come within the limits of a *SHORT APOLOGY*, to give the various interpretations of commenting prieſts on the terrible phraſe, *damnable hereſies*. Suffice it to obſerve, that *hereſy*, like apoſtacy, is a word in itſelf quite innocent, and means no more than *a difference of opinion in matters of religion*. Agreeably to this meaning, and it is the true and original meaning of the word, Paul, in his defence before Agrippa, not only acknowledges himſelf a *heretic* †, but glories in the appellation. "My man-
"ner of life," ſays he, "from my
"youth, which was at the firſt among

* 2 Peter ii. 1.

† If apoſtate and heretic be kindred terms, and if the apoſtle Paul was a heretic, will any body blame me for being a little proud in having got into ſuch good company?

" mine own nation at Jeruſalem, knew
" all the Jews, which knew me from
" the beginning (if they would teſtify),
" that after the moſt ſtraiteſt ſect *, i. e.
" *ſtricteſt hereſy* of our religion, I lived
" a Phariſee."

It is not difficult to account for the various hereſies which ſprang up in the church immediately after the apoſtolical age. Many of the biſhops and prieſts, previous to their converſion, had been orators and philoſophers. The ſects of Pagan philoſophers, although they differed from each other upon points which appeared to them of great importance, yet they had the good ſenſe and humanity never to indulge a ſpirit of perſecution on that account.

* Acts xxvi. 4. 5. The unlearned reader is deſired to obſerve, that the word tranſlated *ſect*, is *hereſy* in the original.

Heresy among them meant no more than a difference in opinion, and this they held to be the inalienable privilege of every man, and upon every ſubject. Accordingly, in the hiſtory of ancient Greece and Rome, we no where find, that the ſtateſmen, the philoſophers, and prieſts, had entered into a combination againſt the right of private judgment, either in philoſophy or in religion.

Of the thirty thouſand gods of the Grecians, every man was at perfect liberty to worſhip whom he liked beſt. The votaries of Bacchus, of Venus, and of Jupiter, provided they led honeſt and uſeful lives, were indiſcriminately admitted into the happy abodes of Elyſium; while the torments of Tartarus were prepared, not for freethinkers, apoſtates, and heretics, but for tyrants, villains, idlers, prudes, and coquettes.

ACCUSTOMED, therefore, to freedom of inquiry in philoſophy, and to freedom of choice in religion, it is no wonder that the firſt converts to Chriſtianity ſhould have carried along with them a portion of that ſpirit which they had imbibed from their childhood, and which they had been taught to hold ſacred.

To this ſpirit, in a great degree, are we to aſcribe that vague interpretation of ſcripture, thoſe ſtrange reveries, and incoherent rhapſodies which are ſo frequently to be met with in the writings of the ancient Fathers *. Hence, too,

* I ſhall give but one inſtance out of a multitude which cannot be numbered. Irenæus, one of the holy Fathers, in a book called Stromata, ſpeaking, I ſuppoſe, of that Millennium which ſome modern divines will have us to believe to be juſt at hand, has the following expreſſions, rich with conſolation to all who look for the ſpeedy approach of that bleſſed period.

"The days will come," ſays he, "in which there "ſhall grow vineyards, having each ten thouſand vine-"ſtocks; and each ſtock, ten thouſand branches; each

in the early period of the church, almoſt every biſhop had a creed of his own, in ſome point, or points, materially different from thoſe of his brethren.

THOSE biſhops, whoſe method of interpreting ſcripture was *nearly* the ſame, and whoſe views of worldly pomp and power were *altogether* the ſame, appear to have entered into a tacit compact to put an end to the multiplication of creeds, by ſubſtituting ſomething of their own, which was to laſt till time ſhould be no more. This combination formed a new æra, both in the Chriſtian church and in the hiſtory of man.

AN experiment was now to be made upon the ſtupidity and credulity of

" branch, ten thouſand bunches; each bunch, ten thou-
" ſand grapes; and each grape, ſqueezed, ſhall yield
" twenty meaſures of wine: And when any of the ſaints
" ſhall go to pluck a bunch, another bunch ſhall cry out,
" *I am better, take me, and bleſs the Lord through me.*"

mankind, which, two hundred years hence, will, by all Europe, be regarded with aſtoniſhment and ſhame.

THE experiment was this: That every Chriſtian *muſt* believe every *tittle* of the Chriſtian religion *exactly in the ſame way*.

GENERAL councils were the theatre where this bold experiment was to be attempted. Princes, Kings, and Emperors, were invited, not only to become ſpectators, but likewiſe to aſſiſt in the great and good work. In thoſe councils, truth and error, orthodoxy * and heterodoxy, like money bills, and bills of impeachment in Parliament, were always decided by the majority of votes.

* When one ſeriouſly reflects on the treaſure that has been exhauſted, and on the blood that has been ſhed in ſettling the meaning of the word *orthodoxy*, one is ſtrongly tempted to wiſh that it had never found its way into the language of man.

GHOSTLY deciſions were ſupported by ghoſtly decrees; and thoſe decrees, enforced by the edicts of Princes, became the inſtrument of reducing all men to the unity of the faith. To ſpeak, or to write againſt thoſe deciſions, or in the moſt diſtant way to inſinuate any thing againſt the infallibility of the men who framed them, was deemed hereſy.

A DISCOVERY was now made, which had eſcaped the penetration, not only of the apoſtle Peter, but of all his brethren in office. *Hereſy* was diſcovered to be the worſt thing in the world; inſomuch, that the man who was found guilty of it was ſubjected both to the pains of eternal damnation, and to temporal puniſhment of the moſt dreadful kinds.

HAVING ſaid this much concerning the origin of human creeds and articles

of faith, it will not be neceſſary to enlarge upon the general character of the men who framed them.

If I ſhould aſſert, that creed-makers had been better than other men, I might be ſuſpected, not only of partiality to the craft, but the hiſtory of the church, from the firſt council of Nice down to the ſynod of Dort, would be produced in diſproof of the aſſertion.

I will not contradict the concurrent teſtimony of hiſtory. That the hiſtory of the church, during the above-mentioned period, is a libel on the artifices of the prieſthood, and a ſatire on the ſtupidity of the reſt of mankind, are facts which will readily be allowed by every body who is but ſuperficially acquainted with it.

I hope that I have already ſhown, to the conviction of all who are willing

to make uſe of common ſenſe, that no man, nor ſet of men, have a right to make articles of faith binding on the conſciences of others. That ſome of the article-makers were pious and learned men, and that they believed themſelves engaged in a good work, are readily admitted; but was the work in which they were engaged a good work becauſe they believed it to be ſo? John Calvin and Michael Servetus differed upon an article of faith. Michael got the better of John in point of argument. John Calvin's zeal grew ſo hot, that it could not be extinguiſhed but in the aſhes of Michael Servetus; and I have no doubt, that, in putting Servetus to death, Calvin believed he did God ſervice. What ſhall we ſay to this? Is not zeal without charity as dangerous as zeal without knowledge?

ARTICLE-MAKERS were like other men before they began the work; but

a bad work can ſcarce fail to ſpoil the beſt principles. The work in which they were employed neceſſarily raiſed them above the level of their fellow men, and this exaltation led them to believe that they were wiſer and better than other men. Hence article-makers did not bluſh to tell the world, that truth, ſtamped with the ſeal of heaven, was to be found only in their general councils. Truth, however, is a ſhy miſtreſs, and that man will be egregiouſly diſappointed who expects to find her in tumultuous aſſemblies, where party ſpirit, avarice, and ambition reign.

It now remains to make a few remarks on the effects which human articles of faith have produced in the Chriſtian world.

To do juſtice to this part of the ſubject would require a folio volume. The reader, however, will remember, that I

am writing, not a hiſtory, but an Apology. One effect of human articles of faith (which indeed includes all the reſt), was, to rob man of his moſt ſacred right, the right of judging for himſelf in all matters which relate to his happineſs or miſery in another world.

THIS holy buſineſs divided Chriſtians into three claſſes; fools, knaves, and heretics.

THE *fools* regarded the dictates of prieſts as the deciſions of heaven; they firmly believed as the church pretended to believe; they perſecuted all who differed from the church; and they followed her ſtandard through good and bad report.

THE *knaves* adopted the eſtabliſhed faith, influenced, I apprehend, by the ſame motives which led the hungry

Jews to follow Chriſt in the wilderneſs.

THE *heretics* fared very ill indeed, and they had themſelves to blame for it. They were allowed neither loaves nor fiſhes. Why? The reaſon is plain. They dared not only to think contrary to the eſtabliſhed faith, but even publicly to avow their opinions. The church could not be ſatisfied with launching the thunderbolts of excommunication againſt them; ſhe alſo contrived to wheedle the kings of the earth to give effect to her ſpiritual artillery by *penal laws;* by fines, impriſonment, confiſcation, baniſhment, fire and faggots, racks, ſcaffolds, gibbets, tortures. Henceforth, the weapons of the church's warfare were carnal, and mighty through an arm of fleſh, to the deſtruction of the bodies, and to the eſtabliſhment of ſpiritual dominion over the ſouls of men.

THE reformation introduced a change ſomewhat for the better; and happy had it been for Chriſtians, if, while they differed in matters of faith, they had had the good ſenſe to live together as brethren.

THIS, however, was far from being the caſe. Inſtead of rejoicing at their emancipation from the thraldom of Popery, and uniting in the bonds of Chriſtian charity, the different ſects began to hate and perſecute one another *. The leaders of the ſects were at great pains to perſuade their adherents that

* I knew a prieſt who uſed to rejoice at the paper war of ſectariſts about faith, grace, and the terms of Chriſtian communion. "Wherefore rejoice?" ſaid I. "Be-"cauſe," replied he, "were it not for theſe bickerings, "we ſhould have no religion amongſt us at all." I knew another, who, in a ſelect company, and exhilarated by the blood of the grape, declared the Bible to be a groſs impoſition. It is not my buſineſs to apologize for theſe eccentricities; yet, were I called upon to do ſo, I would ſay, that theſe, and ſuch like men, are always orthodox in the pulpit, and that when the cardinal points of Chriſtianity are attacked by others, they are ready to fight *quaſi pro aris et focis*.

the reſt of mankind were in the broad way, and that they, and they only, were in the way of ſalvation. When I uſed to hear thoſe good paſtors, I have ſometimes fancied myſelf tranſported into the preſence of a quack vociferating from the ſtage, that all his brethren of the craft were impoſtors, and that to him *alone* had been imparted the gift of healing all manner of diſeaſes.

Some ſay that times are better, and that Chriſtians begin to open their eyes upon the uſurpations of their ſpiritual guides. Yes, the times are better, and they will be better ſtill. I ſhall not ſee it; but, with joyful expectation, I anticipate the happy period, when man ſhall aſſert the dignity of his nature; when he ſhall break the fetters by which he has ſo long and ſo ingloriouſly been bound; and when he ſhall dare to ſpeak, judge, and act for himſelf in all matters of conſcience and ſalvation.

BLESSED Millennium! when truth ſhall triumph over error; and when reaſon, no longer eclipſed by the clouds of ſuperſtition, ſhall ſhed her cheering beams over the whole earth.

DOCTRINES WHICH THE APOLOGIST UNDERSTOOD NOT, AND, THEREFORE, DID NOT ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN.

TRINITY in unity.—Proof of the Trinity eſtabliſhed upon the evidence of Elohim, eſſence, exiſtence, ſubſiſtence, properties, equality, duration, eternal generation, and proceſſion.—The incarnation of God, or God manifeſted in the fleſh.—Abſolute decrees of election and reprobation.—Eternal damnation.—The new birth, and the pangs thereof; with clinical illuſtrations, ſhowing the parallel between natural gene-

ration and ſpiritual regeneration.—The federal heads.—The covenants of works, grace, and redemption.—The parties, the conditions, the ends, and the privileges of theſe covenants.—The two natures of Chriſt, and the hypoſtatical union of theſe natures.—The efficacy and extent of the atonement.—Faith, the hand of the ſoul that lays hold on the imputed righteouſneſs.—The doctrine of good works, although not invented by the devil, is, nevertheleſs, a dangerous doctrine.—Man, although he acts from irrevocable decrees, or neceſſity, is, nevertheleſs, accountable for his actions.—The fall of man.—The way in which original ſin was contracted and communicated, with proofs phyſical and metaphyſical.—Infant baptiſm.—Experience of the ſaints, and the ſolutions of caſes of conſcience.—The operations of the Holy Ghoſt in converſion.—The paſſiveneſs of the ſoul in converſion; the nature, the manner,

the date, the place, and the fruits of converſion.

SOME of theſe doctrines I could not at all diſcover in the Bible; the others, although contained in it, appeared to me inexplicable *. Let this be aſcribed to dulneſs, but not to want of inveſtigation. I did every thing that a zealous inquirer after truth could do. I ſearched the ſcriptures, and beſought the God of truth "to open mine eyes "to behold the wondrous things of his "law." I ſearched and prayed in vain.

I HAD recourſe to the commentaries of the dead. I was diſappointed. Inſtead of unravelling thoſe knotty points,

* It is one thing not to underſtand a doctrine, and quite another to believe it to be falſe. I do not diſpute the truth of the abovementioned doctrines; I have only ſaid that I do not underſtand them; and hence I infer, that it is as abſurd as it is preſumptuous for a man to pretend to teach others what he does not himſelf underſtand.

I found the dead doctors in perpetual contradiction to one another.

I THEN betook myſelf to the forlorn hope. I conſulted the living doctors, but found they had not a word to ſay that had not already been ſaid by the dead.

POLITICAL PRAYER.

BY political prayer, I mean forms of petitions for averting ſome real or ſuppoſed national calamity, and of thankſgiving for ſome real or ſuppoſed national bleſſing, drawn up by rulers in church or ſtate, and which *the great body of the people, under certain penalties or diſcouragements, are bound to preſent to God.*

If, when a nation is at war, the rulers ſhould command the people to pray for the deſtruction of the enemy, this would furniſh an example of political prayer.

The following poſitions appear to me obvious and incontrovertible:

Firſt, That in the New Teſtament ſcriptures, there is neither warrant, example, nor precept for political prayer.

Next, That two nations at war are apt to be partial each in its own cauſe; and, ſuppoſing thoſe two nations to be both in the wrong, the political ſupplications of thoſe nations reſpectively muſt be abominable to the God of juſtice and truth.

Laſtly, Admitting that of two nations at war the one is altogether in the right and the other in the wrong. In this

caſe, the cauſe of the righteous nation is the cauſe of God; and we are ſure that God will maintain his own cauſe, whether the righteous nation pray for his interpoſition or not *.

UNDER the article of *Private Judgment*, I have ſhown, that religion, in all its parts, is a matter altogether between God and man, and that for any man authoritatively to interfere between God and rational creatures, is a profane uſurpation of his prerogatives. Men of ſenſe and probity, will, in every caſe, diſtinguiſh the obedience which they owe to civil governors from that which they owe to God, the only Lord over the conſcience.

* When heathen nations were at war, the prieſts were buſily employed in preſenting to the gods, ſacrifices, libations, and prayers for the deſtruction of the enemy. Whether or not Chriſtian nations, in their political ſupplications, copy the example of the heathen, it is not for me to determine; but I cannot be wrong in aſſerting, that they neither imitate the example nor obey the precepts of the founder of the Chriſtian religion.

O EARTH-WORM! ſaid I to myſelf, what haſt thou to do between my God and me? Art thou a Chriſtian, and doſt thou command me to pray for the deſtruction of my fellow men? Wilt thou ſet my heart at variance with my lips, and force my lips to utter what my heart abhors? If there be any quarrel between thee and thy enemy, in which avarice, ambition, or revenge are concerned, let thee and thy enemy decide it. I beſeech thee not to call upon me for the interceſſion even of theſe prayers which thyſelf haſt dictated. They may do thee harm, but can do thee no good. God is the father and friend of all mankind; it is in vain to call upon me to hate and deſtroy thoſe whom God loves. I am not crocodile-hearted; and I perceive, that, in my frame, there is more of the Indian bramin than of the Chriſtian prieſt.

I AM not in the ſecrets of princes. I

know not why they go to war. But this I know, that the ſecrets of the Almighty are inſcrutable; and, therefore, I ſhall never betray my weakneſs, nor my impiety, by preſuming to dictate to him in whoſe hand are the revolutions of kingdoms and of empires. His thoughts are not like mine, nor his ways like mine.

CHRISTIAN prieſts! when will you be like him whom you call your maſter? When will you ſhow yourſelves the miniſters of the Prince of Peace?

ALWAYS alleging your own cauſe to be the cauſe of God, in one breath you ſupplicate Heaven for the deſtruction of the enemy, and, in the next, you pray for the time when "wars ſhall "ceaſe, and nations ſhall beat their "ſwords into plough-ſhares, and their "ſpears into pruning hooks." I leave

the reconciliation of contradictions to thoſe whom it may concern.

You ſhow great zeal for the ſalvation of thoſe committed to your charge; inſomuch, that I have heard one of your number declare, that, "if he were "to become the inſtrument of convert-"ing but *one* ſinner, he ſhould think "himſelf abundantly rewarded for the "labour and toils of forty years mini-"ſtry." If the converſion of one ſinner coſts ſo much labour and pains, what think you will become of thoſe who are like ſheep without a ſhepherd, and who are ſeldom led out into the green paſtures? What think you will become of the hundred thouſands of your fellow men, who, in the courſe of one campaign, fall in the field of battle?

"FIGHT for the faith," ſaid Mahomet to his followers: "Fight, and I

"will give you paradiſe." Do you ſuppoſe the terms of admiſſion into the kingdom of God and into the paradiſe of Mahomet to be the ſame? Do you ſuppoſe that all who fight and die in defence of political, moral, and religious order, ſhall certainly receive a crown of immortal glory? If I could be convinced that this is the happy deſtiny of thoſe brave men, old as I am, and little inclined to fighting, I ſhould be ſtrongly tempted to offer myſelf a candidate for the palm of this kind of martyrdom.

THE GREAT DUTY OF MAN TO MAN.

WHEN man, in any inſtance, ſurrenders the right of thinking, ſpeaking, judging, and acting for himſelf in matters of religion, from that moment he

becomes not only the eaſy prey of every impoſtor, but alſo forfeits his title to that diſtinction which God deſigned him to hold in his creation.

But is it poſſible that men, that Chriſtians, ſhould tamely ſurrender the uſe of reaſon in matters of ſuch vaſt importance? Yes. The condition of Chriſtians during twelve hundred years was the ſame with that of the Jews in Chriſt's time, and with that of the heathen nations at all times: Obedience to the prieſthood was the religion of the people.

It is, therefore, the great duty of Chriſtians to unite in aſſerting the dignity of their nature; mutually to inſtruct each other in their independency in all matters of conſcience and eternal ſalvation; and to take their religion from the Bible alone, and not from any ſet of men, how high ſoever their repu-

tation may be for learning or piety. I call this the great duty of man to man, becauſe it includes juſtice, charity, and mercy, and is connected with all the other ſocial virtues.

THIS great duty, while a prieſt of the eſtabliſhed church, I found it impoſſible to perform. Had I conceived myſelf to be barely innocent, I might poſſibly have contrived ſome apology for continuing in the office; but I regarded myſelf not only as uſeleſs, but injurious to ſociety. I was obliged to accommodate my doctrines to human creeds and confeſſions of faith. Had I explained the doctrines of Chriſtianity according to my own ſentiments, I ſhould have ſubjected myſelf to the moſt inſupportable of human evils, the perſecution of the prieſthood. It is true, that, in this caſe, I might have had recourſe to the grand ghoſtly catholicon, a RECANTATION; but my

ſoul ſhrunk from the vile expedient, and I reſolved voluntarily to abandon an office which I could no longer hold with a clear conſcience.

Were I to live to the age of Methuſelah, I ſhould look back upon the years of my prieſthood as a blank which might be filled up; but when I reflect, that the unlucky flood has reduced the term of my exiſtence here within the narrow compaſs of four-ſcore years, I cannot regard the loſs of nine years without the keeneſt ſenſations of regret. May the painful reflection never ceaſe to admoniſh me to employ, in future, my poor abilities for the benefit of my fellow men! It is my ambition to live an uſeful life, and to die an honeſt man. To do juſtly, and love mercy, are my beſt intereſts in this world, and, by walking humbly with God, I lay up treaſure in heaven.

CONCLUSION.

IT is evident that this ſmall pamphlet might have eaſily been ſwelled into a large volume. Many ſubjects might have been introduced which I have purpoſely omitted, and even thoſe that have been treated have not been ſo fully diſcuſſed as their importance deſerves. In a work of this kind, the frequent recurrence of egotiſms, however diſguſting, was, nevertheleſs, unavoidable; and, therefore, when a man tells a ſtory about himſelf, the ſhorter the better: Hence I have intituled it a *SHORT APOLOGY*.

CONCISENESS, as far as it was deemed conſiſtent with perſpicuity, has been ſtudied throughout; whilſt artificial ornaments of language have carefully been avoided. I have advanced no-

thing but what I believe to be true; and truth, like Thomſon's Lavinia,

——— Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,
But is, when unadorn'd, adorn'd the moſt.

THE Biſhop of Landaff has declared to the world, that he will make no reply to any anſwer that may be attempted to his "Apology for the Bible*." This is biſhop-like; and his Lordſhip muſt think himſelf altogether in the right, and that thoſe who anſwer him muſt be in the wrong.

I AM now no prieſt, and therefore may be excuſed if I put in no claim to infallibility. Already I have acknowledged (what every body knows) my liableneſs to miſtakes and errors in judgment. I have ſaid that I am open

* Conſidering the Biſhop's abilities to defend himſelf, it is a pity that he ſhould have taken ſuch a reſolution; although it is ſtill a greater pity that the Bible ſhould have been thought to need an Apology.

to conviction, and ſeek it. Like the Biſhop, I am not fond of controverſy; and the active, honeſt, and uſeful calling I am now in, leaves me but little leiſure to enter the liſt. I, therefore, challenge no man; yet if any man ſhall be diſpoſed to throw down the gauntlet, I will take it up, and, if I be foiled in the encounter, I ſhall retire from the liſt, with this conſolation, that wiſe and honeſt men will impute the diſcomfiture, not to the badneſs of the cauſe, but to the weakneſs of the champion.

BRITISH
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MUSEUM

THE END.